



HR HIGHLIGHTS

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Seasons Greetings Everyone!

A Summary of the Office of Human Resources Management Accomplishments for Fiscal Year 2002

During the period October 1, 2001, through September 30, 2002, the Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) served on numerous internal and external taskforces, committees and ad hoc groups, and accomplished major special projects for the Department. Further, staff from OHRM appeared in various media, i.e., the Federal Times, FEDTALK, and satellite broadcasts. In addition to the accomplishments listed below, OHRM responded to numerous Congressional inquiries as well as answering thousands of calls from field HR professionals. We are dedicated to serving you. We are continuously guided by our motto **The Right Answer, The Right Solution, The Right Way!**



Ventris C. Gibson

VA's Workforce Planning Council: The Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration is the "process owner" for workforce planning and established the Workforce Planning Council to promote dialogue among the Department's most senior officials regarding human capital management. This body is comprised of the Deputy Under Secretaries for Health, Benefits, and Memorial Affairs and ensures a better level of coordination among VA leaders on resource requirements and a more corporate approach to implementing workforce and succession planning initiatives. OHRM served as the principal HRM advisor to the Council. The purpose of the Council is to ensure that workforce planning at all organizational levels links to VA's strategic planning process and affords an opportunity to identify cross-cutting workforce planning issues and develop appropriate strategies to address them at the Departmental level. OHRM efforts, with the collaboration and cooperation from the three Administrations and the staff offices, resulted in VA moving from a red (fail) score in Human Capital Management to a green (pass) score.

Recruitment and Marketing: Using existing resources to establish an Office of Marketing and Recruitment, OHRM developed a draft strategic plan for creating and implementing a "corporate" recruitment and marketing program to address the human capital requirements of each Administration and staff office VA-wide. In conjunction with a Department-wide work group, OHRM developed a proposal for a coordinated national marketing campaign to promote VA employment. OHRM implemented a number of interim steps to improve recruitment and marketing efforts in the Department, including revising VA's recruitment Web site to make it user-friendly, attractive, and informative for prospective applicants and expanding recruitment and outreach efforts.

Continuity of Operations and Continuity of Government: Following the September 11th tragedy and its impact on the Department, the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Human Resources Management was chosen as one of eight officials to serve on the Department's primary Crises Response Team. In this capacity, OHRM accomplished the following:

- Led OHRM's continuity of operations (COOP) and continuity of government (COG) efforts during the Department's response to the events of September 11th (2001); developed and implemented an in-house orientation session to educate all OHRM senior managers on COOP, COG, and other emergency preparedness procedures; directed and managed the development of an employee emergency preparedness education packet to assist employees in developing family care plans and actions/activities that respond to emergencies situations; and enhanced the availability of OHRM employees during crisis situations.

VA in the News

A "Man of Honor" Speaks to VA

VA proudly joined the Nation in celebrating National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) during October. The 2002 theme was "New Freedom for the 21st Century." Reportedly, more than 3,700 VA employees (1.93%) have targeted disabilities, many of them veterans. These employees are an essential part of our workforce and have demonstrated excellence in executive, administrative, managerial, and technical fields.

A luncheon was held October 23, 2002, for NDEAM at the Washington Army-Navy Club. Carl Brashear, the Navy's first and only African-American master diver and Master Chief, was the key note speaker for the event. Brashear's address was also featured on VA News October 28-November 4.

In 1948, Brashear joined the Navy at the age of 17, during the time the U.S. military was desegregated, with visions of a worldly vocation. Nevertheless, he found himself assigned and confined to the galley like all blacks and Filipinos of the era. After observing the specialty of deep-sea diving, he committed himself to making that his profession, which was unheard of for a Black sailor at the time.

In 1966, Brashear was injured during a nuclear weapon recovery mission and, as a result, was an amputee for most of his Navy career. He spoke to VA employees about the values of hiring people with disabilities. Having not been disabled all of his life, he was able to relate to and address pro and con employment issues from both sides of the topic.

Mr. Brashear's outstanding achievements during his military career afforded his life to be made into a major motion picture in 2000 by 20th Century Fox. The film starred Oscar award-winning actors Robert DiNero and Cuba Gooding, Jr. (who portrayed Brashear in the film).



Mr. Brashear shown with Oscar winning actor Cuba Gooding, Jr. on the set of "Men of Honor."

Photo provided courtesy of 20th Century Fox

Celebrating Native American Heritage Month

The month of November celebrates and honors the history of Native Americans. VA proudly joined America to celebrate Native American Indian Heritage Month.

National Native American Heritage Month celebrates the culture, contributions, and heritage of Native Americans. For many years, Native Americans and others proposed that a special day be set aside to honor Native Americans. The efforts to establish a day of recognition resulted in a month being designated for that purpose. Since 1976, the Presidents of the United States and Congressional resolutions have proclaimed a day, a week or a month of recognition.

During this celebration period, VA programs featured Native American Cultural Demonstrations, a variety of Native American crafts, food, and other exciting Native American cultural exhibits.

Native American Heritage Month



At a ceremony held at VA for Native American Heritage Month, the true meaning of the drum beat was explained as it relates to their culture.

VA Employees Continue to Serve on Reserve Duty

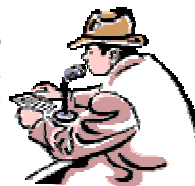


As of November 2002, statistics show that 382 full-time permanent VA employees continue to serve on reserve duty as a result of the events of September 11, 2001. Of those called for duty, the following occupations were affected:

- 51 Police Officers
- 38 Staff Nurses
- 27 Claims Examiners/Veterans Service Representatives
- 18 Housekeeping Aids
- 11 Physicians
- 11 Chaplains

Feel free to contact **HR Highlights** via e-mail anytime to submit news, articles, or other information that may be suitable for inclusion in this publication. We also invite questions and comments.

Highlights@mail.va.gov



A Nation Remembers Its Veterans

In 1918, on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day in the eleventh month, the world rejoiced and celebrated. After four years of bitter war, the Allied powers signed a cease-fire agreement (an armistice) with Germany at Rethondes, France, on November 11, 1918, bringing World War I to a close. The "war to end all wars" was over.

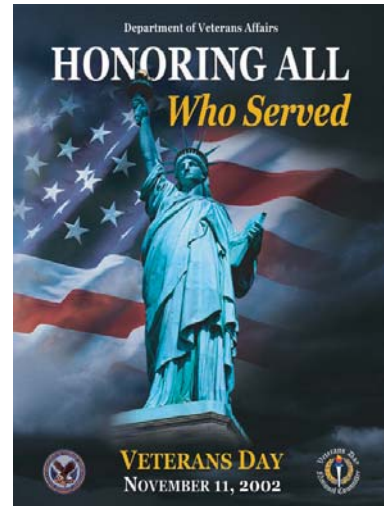
November 11, 1919, was set aside as Armistice Day in the United States, to remember the sacrifices that men and women made during World War I in order to ensure lasting peace.

Armistice Day officially received its name in the United States in 1926 through a Congressional resolution. It became a national holiday 12 years later. Congress voted Armistice Day a Federal holiday in 1938, 20 years after the war ended. But Americans realized that the previous war would not be the last one. World War II began the following year and nations great and small again participated in a bloody struggle. After the second World War, Armistice Day continued to be observed on November 11.

Around 1953, citizens of Emporia, Kansas, began calling the holiday Veterans' Day in gratitude to the veterans in their town. Soon after, Congress passed a bill, introduced by a Kansas congressman, renaming the Federal holiday to Veterans Day.

In 1954, the United States designated November 11 as Veterans Day to honor veterans of all U.S. wars. In 1971, President Nixon declared it a Federal holiday observed on the second Monday in November. Americans still give thanks for peace on Veterans Day. There are ceremonies, speeches, and at 11:00 in the morning, most Americans observe a moment of silence to remember those who fought for peace.

VA officials, friends, families, and other visitors, along with the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Day National Committee, took part in the Forty-Ninth Annual Veterans Day National Ceremony at the Memorial Amphitheater, Arlington National Cemetery, which included a wreath laying observance.



HR Monthly Conference Call

Please join us the 2nd Wednesday of each month at 3:00PM (EST), when we discuss various interesting HR topics.

The next set of conference calls are

**HR Monthly
Conference Call**

scheduled for December 11,
January 8, and February 12.

To call in, dial 1-800-767-1750
For more information,
contact Mr. Terry Young at 273-9821

SESCDP Orientation Begins

November 4th was the beginning of the One VA Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program (SESCDP) Orientation Week. Dr. Jacob Lozada, Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration, opened the orientation by welcoming the candidates and providing pointers on self-development, which was followed by Bob Schultz' points on The Keys to SES. Marisa Palkuti hosted an evening reception with guest speakers, The Honorable Leo S. Mackay, Jr. and Lynn Waymon, author of "Networking."

Prior to the orientation, the USDA Graduate School assessed each of the candidates with a 360 degree assessment. Candidates received their written results, which were used to begin their individual development action planning. SES mentors were on-hand for the mentor/candidate training and, as a result, were able to assist the candidates with assessing individual needs and matching those needs with developmental assignments.

The orientation was rated excellent overall, and the candidates also expressed that they are eagerly looking forward to their development during the next 12-18 months and SES certification.

DAS

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- Assisted the Department in developing comprehensive emergency preparedness plans that enhance continuity of government in crisis situations and natural disasters; successfully managed the development and dissemination of a master resource guide in the form of a disk that contained lessons learned during September 11th and human resources policy and regulations for use during crisis situations and natural disasters; set a new standard for other Administrations and staff offices in the area of emergency planning.
- Worked directly with OPM, to gain authority to waive dual compensation for retirees as well as waiving buyout repayment for retired employees VA would like to bring back to cover shortages in various occupations.
- Developed procedures and reports that provided management with employee military activation information; provided in-depth analysis and statistical information for the Annual Report to Congress on the Department of Veterans Affairs Bed Capacity in Support of the Department of Defense Contingency Planning by providing VA reserve reports; created VA Reserve list spreadsheet for electronic accessibility.
- Assisted in piloting the first series of the VA Leadership Forum, a cross-organizational initiative sponsored by the VA Learning University (VALU), with technical assistance from the Office of Workforce Planning. The program's theme was "VA National Preparedness," with an emphasis on preparing our workforce to take on new emergency preparedness responsibilities while continuing to provide care and services to our Nation's veterans. VA was privileged to hear from many prestigious guest speakers, including the Honorable Tom Ridge, Office of Homeland Security, and Secretary Principi. The long-term goal of this initiative is to provide a series of forums on topics of interest to VA's leadership cadre nationwide.

Veterans Employment Program: The Director, National Veterans Employment Program, implemented an aggressive and continuous recruitment campaign to attract and retain veterans in VA's workforce. We ensured the participation of recruiters at military transition centers. In a variety of conferences designed to educate veterans on employment opportunities, we increased the number of veterans employed in the Department by 4% over the previous year. We also improved outreach to veteran groups and organizations throughout the Nation by increasing dialogue with veterans service organizations, minority veteran groups, colleges and universities, and military transition centers around the country.

Policy Development and Implementation: OHRM developed and implemented the following policies:

- Student Loan Repayment Program
- Federal Career Intern Program
- Use of 3rd party survey data under the Nurse Locality Pay System
- Revisions to Head Nurse pay provisions
- Hostile Fire Pay
- Pay Retention for Title 38
- Rate range extensions at Nurse I grade
- Premium Pay for Weekend Work for T38 Hybrid Employees
- Exceptions to the Bi-Weekly Premium Pay Limitation for Emergencies
- Parental Status and Protected Genetic Information
- Reasonable Accommodation (VA Directive 5975.1).
- OHRM developed and distributed a complete set of integrated HR policies into a One VA electronic version located on the OHRM Web site. This process also identified a series of policies that could be improved with changes. OHRM listed these proposals for priority consideration by customers.
- Based on customer input, OHRM developed a legislative package on physician pay, hybrids, etc., and responded to OMB questions and defended proposals against a generic Federal legislative package that did not fix HR programs. On Cemetery Caretakers, OHRM ensured that OPM issued policy quickly, fixing the problem.

SES Candidate Development Program (CDP): OHRM announced the VA SES Candidate Development Program (CDP) which resulted in the Secretary of Veterans Affairs selecting 17 candidates to participate. In early November, the SES CDP class met and began its formal training.

Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Demonstration Project: In November 2001, IRS requested the Department's involvement in an IRS funded Demonstration Project to study the structure and function of the Senior Executive Service (SES). The project will also test new ways of carrying out innovative human resources programs and practices that affect senior level positions. A mandatory part of the project is the use of a "Comparison Group." IRS requested that VA serve as the comparison group throughout this study. The evaluation proceeds by comparing changes in the IRS SES corps with VA SES over a period of time. The project is expected to run 5 years and will be evaluated annually. OHRM coordinated the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) approving VA's involvement and worked with IRS to coordinate a signing ceremony with the Commissioner of IRS and VA's Deputy Secretary. To facilitate the project prior to the MOU signing, provided IRS data on VA SES (and T-38 equivalents) such as hires, losses, demographics (race, age gender, veteran status), and performance and pay (ratings, pay increases, bonuses). VA will invest time and resources, and will benefit in the following ways:

- Receive copies of all evaluation findings and reports that demonstrate the effectiveness of the personnel innovations;
- Provide VA the ability to "make the case" to OPM for implementing successful personnel innovations for VA executives;
- Obtain "lessons learned" on implementing certain personnel innovations, i.e., what worked vs. what did not work.
- Receive a long-term data library that tracks trends important for understanding how to attract, develop and retain executive personnel.

Whistleblower Protection and Executive Conduct and Performance: OHRM pursued and successfully obtained Office of Special Counsel certification of VA's Whistleblower Protection Program. Provided oversight in monitoring actions taken based on findings of discrimination and provided employee relations guidance and assistance on cases involving senior managers. This includes guidance to investigating teams as well as providing oversight of investigation teams and concurrence on proposed disciplinary/adverse actions against senior managers.

HR Flexibility Study: Tasked by the Secretary and Deputy Secretary with determining Department-wide HR flexibilities. The resulting study found that VA contributes to problems with maximizing flexibilities to recruit and retain a quality workforce. In areas such as incentive awards, VA budgets less dollars per capita than other federal agencies. VA facilities cut HR corners because of low HR staff levels to carry out recruitment and to properly execute basic staffing processes to improve the selection process. OHRM recommended VHA increase its HR specialist ratio to employees. OHRM also recommended improvements in use of techniques associated with quality hiring and posted guidance on the OHRM Web site.

Child Care Subsidy Program: Successfully developed and implemented the Federal Government's best (according to the Office of Personnel Management) Child Care Subsidy Program on a **permanent** basis and increased the amount in determining eligibility. Today, over 1,000 employees participate. VA expends slightly over \$1 million in subsidies. VA's program was featured in OPM's newsletter and in the Washington Post.

One VA Employee Survey: Completed the One VA survey and provided reports to all Administrations and staff offices.

Legislative Proposals: Worked tirelessly on the Department's legislative proposals that would convert 17 Title 5 occupations to Title 38 hybrids, increase senior executive pay, clarify the law regarding the exceptional qualifications provision of physician and dentist special pay, establish premium pay parity, expand veterans employment for cemetery caretakers, and numerous other provisions. OHRM successfully articulated the needs of the Department on this initiative by providing extensive data and justification.

Title 38 Training: Conducted several 2-week training sessions on Title 38 to field HR professionals. The training was rated outstanding. Since that time, OHRM has received four requests for additional training.

Human Resources Development: Developed and presented a Basic HR Processing & Records "Train-the-Trainer" course. This course was designed to develop capability within each VISN, or to join with adjacent VISNs, to locally train processing and records staff throughout VA. Experienced HR personnel from across the country participated in the course. Participants learned about the PAID/OLDE system and became skilled in a myriad of issues related to processing personnel actions for Title 5 and Title 38 employees.

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DAS

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Women's Executive Forum: Established the Women Executive Forum (WEF). The catalyst behind the implementation of the Women Executive Forum, a major initiative designed to address the concerns of women in the VA workforce and to facilitate the professional development of women throughout the Department. Successfully planned and hosted a networking luncheon that was attended by 150 VA women employees. Planned and executed the Secretary's Roundtable Focus Group, attended by 25 senior VA women executives. Successfully directed this new VA initiative and developed strategies for the effective mentoring, networking, and professional development of women to fill critical positions identified in the agency's workforce succession plan. Developed strategies to host the Secretary's Task Force to address diversity in VA.

SES Allocation: The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) manages and distributes SES allocation for the Federal Government. VA has an allocation of 310 slots. This year, for the first time in the Department's history, VA was faced with filling more SES jobs than slots available. OHRM spearheaded the Department's efforts in managing the SES allocation including developing a response to OPM for the Biennial Review that requested 20 additional SES slots and coordinated meetings of the VA ERB to discuss SES allocation and provided up-to-date data for these meetings on the current number of positions established, slots filled, and slots available. Facilitated meetings of the ERB and assisted in the development of a mechanism to provide the Secretary with monthly data on SES allocation to use when determining which critical jobs to fill first. Continued to work directly with OPM in an attempt to increase VA's SES allocation of SES positions.

SES Performance Management: Developed recommendations for change in VA SES performance in the four key areas: VA PRB Membership, VA PRB Bonus Review Process, SES Performance Cycle Timeline for 2002, and the Secretary/Deputy Secretary Approval Process.

Pay Rates: Ensured the publication of over 2300 pay tables in January on the OHRM Web site (1500 SSR tables; 600 nurse pay tables; 120 FWS tables; 100 basic and locality pay tables for T38 and GS employees).

Annual Review: Completed the Title 38 and Title 5 annual reviews to determine if special rate occupations should receive the annual General Schedule increase. Reviewed and implemented 308 new or revised nurse pay schedules (excluding the 1/02 statutory adjustment). Additionally, implemented 134 new or revised special salary rate tables (excluding the annual review).

Pay Raise: Processed automatic pay adjustments for over 188,000 VA employees for the January 2002 pay raise. Continually processed throughout the year adjustments for wage and canteen schedules as well as nurse, resident, and special salary rate schedules (over 700 schedules).

Advisory Services: Provided advisory services and procedural advice to the HR community, receiving over 6,000 calls for assistance. Assisted with interpretation of OPM's Guide to Processing Personnel Actions, Guide to Personnel Record Keeping, and the PAID Coding Manual.

Central Personnel Data File: In the past, VA has always mailed the CPDF Status, Dynamic, and Organizational Components translations to OPM on a magnetic tape. This process caused unnecessary delays, which negatively impacted VA's timeliness scorecard for submission of the files to OPM. This fiscal year, we developed a way to transmit these files to OPM electronically. This significantly improved VA's scorecard, reducing the number of days for submission to an average of 13 days in March 2002. OPM's standard is 30 days. VA's submission continues to improve. These files were transmitted to OPM within 5 days in July 2002 and 9 days in August 2002.

PAID/OLDE Latent Defects: Since the demise of HR LINK\$, decisions were made to bring the PAID/OLDE system up to current standards and address latent defects. Many service requests, explaining user requirements and business rules, were developed and forwarded to the Change Control Board (CCB) for implementation.

Station Integrations: In FY 2002, three stations were successfully integrated. These integrations required coordination of table changes; salary rate changes, consisting of wage, nurse, and special salary rate schedules; and mass transfers of employees to the new station. These transfers were seamless, with no adverse impact to any employee.

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Reports:

- ♦ Established a new Web page on the Workforce Information Systems Team (WIST) portion of the OHRM Web site, entitled WIST Standard Reports. The Web page currently contains an 8-page index for VA standard reports and two reports. The goal is to have as many of the standard reports made accessible on the Web page as possible, as OHRM moves to eliminate e-mailing, photocopying; or mailing paper copies of the reports.
- ♦ Provided all official employment figures for the Department, e.g., to OPM, OMB, White House, Congress, and others. Ensured availability and/or distribution to the users such as VHA/VBA managers, OPM, GAO, and OMB. Provided over 325 Ad Hoc reports to customers.

Shared Service Center in Topeka, Kansas

- ♦ Implemented reimbursable wage grade examining services at facilities' request from Topeka DEU in mid-June, handled 42 requests by the end of the fiscal year.
- ♦ Implemented agreement with VISN 11 to do Pre-registration work
- ♦ Orchestrated the implementation of Series I Bonds in VA
- ♦ Conducted Annual Savings Bond Campaign during which VA employee participation increased 10%
- ♦ Provided remote Payroll Services to Grand Junction VA Medical Center
- ♦ Completed 8477 FEHB reconciliations with carriers
- ♦ Responded to 1079 inquiries from field stations on payroll policy and procedures
- ♦ Completed 320,000 Canteen Allotments with a value of nearly \$44,000,000
- ♦ Updated 968 Canteen cost distribution percentages
- ♦ Processed 950 TSP adjustments
- ♦ Processed 4377 requests for reissued W-2s during the peak period from January thru April
- ♦ Processed 32,727 hardcopy CFC forms and 4526 automated CFC elections
- ♦ Processed 8000 Notice of Account Changes since June 2002
- ♦ Processed 9000 Requests for Personnel Action with only one pay-affecting reject
- ♦ Finished the fiscal year with unobligated balance of \$23.72
- ♦ Returned \$476,070 to be reprogrammed (used \$350,000 for A/R program)
- ♦ Entered into MOU's with Murfreesboro CMOP and ORM
- ♦ Began providing remote HR/Payroll/OPF services to Murfreesboro CMOP
- ♦ Transitioned some program office functions to SSC - demise of HR LINK\$
- ♦ Incorporated all new Presidential Mandates and GSA requirements into the Shared Service Center's (SSC) Disaster/ Business Recovery Plan making it compliant with the Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) requirements
- ♦ Implemented the SSC telephone survey program. Included in the program were telephone surveys for Classification, Retirement, Topeka Delegated Examining Unit (DEU), Richmond DEU, and Employee Self Service (ESS). In addition, processed, analyzed and reported in excess of 78,000 automated ESS customer surveys and reviewed, categorized, and reported more than 4,000 individual survey comments.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- ♦ Redesigned the Employee Relations Web site to provide more information and guidance to the Department on issues related to conduct, performance, awards, and grievances.
- ♦ Conducted Disciplinary Appeals Board training for VHA Board Members.
- ♦ Completed the HR Intern guide. Provided guidance on developmental assignments for newly hired HR Specialists. Provided extensive tools for developing job specific competencies.
- ♦ **VA's Next Generation Work Group:** Hosted VA's Next Generation Work Group. The purpose of the work group was to obtain the input of fresh, aspiring VA employees regarding their perspective of the recruitment, retention, and development issues that face the Department and how they would go about addressing these issues. Their findings were presented to the Strategic Management Council in January 2002. This is the first of many attempts to obtain VA employee input regarding workforce issues.

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- ◆ Survey results were presented in graphical and text formats. Results were publicized both internally to SSC management and staff and externally to key stakeholders.
- ◆ A minimum of 2% of all calls and Lotus Notes closed cases are monitored and reviewed on a monthly basis. From analysis of evaluation results, recommendations on improvements and/or training issues are relayed to the appropriate manager and supervisor(s) through monthly-consolidated reports.
- ◆ Incoming calls – Monitored an average of 76 agents on a monthly basis. A total of 6,733 evaluations were conducted on calls for the areas of the Call Center, Benefits, Classification, Staffing/DEU, Payroll, and Employment Systems Technician (EST). “Not Met” ratings averaged 6% or less.
- ◆ Case Management – Reviewed an average of 101 SSC employees on a monthly basis. A total of 4,128 evaluations were conducted on Lotus Notes cases for the areas of Benefits, Classification, Staffing/DEU, Payroll, EST, and Retirement. “Not Met” ratings averaged less than 10%.
- ◆ Processed 717 FOIA/PA requests and Congressional inquiries. FOIA/PA requests include employment and salary verifications and Child Equity Court/Administrative Orders. FY 2001 Annual FOIA Report was completed and submitted in a timely manner meeting deadline requirement.
- ◆ Developed detailed and specific concept papers, plans, timetables and systems and processes for establishing and administering a data driven VA-wide HR Accountability Program.
- ◆ Developed new Secretary Honor Award for Unit (e.g., Facility) Accomplishments to enable the Secretary to recognize an organizational unit (e.g., NY VAMC for exceptional support during the 9/11 crisis). Currently pending Secretary's approval.
- ◆ At the close FY 2002, approximately 700 HR Specialists and Assistants nationwide received training in HR technical specialties of Classification, Staffing & Placement, Pay Setting, Employee Relations, HR Consulting, Processing and Records Coding.
- ◆ Developed Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) Coordinators Job Performance Charts, an easy to use tool for directors to use in staffing and establishing expectations for ADR Coordinator positions.
- ◆ Created a Professional Development Framework for the VA which lays out a model and plan for advancing and coordinating learning in the Department.
- ◆ Launched Workforce and Succession Planning Web site. The Web site is available to all VA employees and provides many excellent features, including a letter from Secretary Principi affirming his commitment to VA employees, workforce planning analyses and reports sent to the Office of Management and Budget, workforce data, and numerous workforce and succession planning resources and tools.
- ◆ Created and distributed an electronic survey for the VALU Workforce and Leadership Development Subcommittee. The survey allowed VA senior executives to be polled quickly and efficiently regarding their leadership development needs.
- ◆ Created database for storage and retrieval of resumes of applicants for the Secretary's Advisory Committee. This database was completed for the Office of White House Liaison. It allowed them to effectively store, retrieve, and categorize resumes submitted to VA for consideration to committee appointments.
- ◆ Created Excel spreadsheet for use in tracking VA committee membership. This effort was completed for the White House Liaison Office. It is the second phase of the database project. Once all committees are identified and completed, the data will be added to the database. The third phase will be to create a Web interface for the database so that information may be entered and reviewed on-line.
- ◆ Created Electronic Survey for the Human Resources Management Rebuilding Committee. Allowed the HRM community to be polled quickly and efficiently regarding the state of human resources management within VA.
- ◆ Developed and launched an on-line application and management process for the VACO Human Resources Management Service (HRMS). The system allows VA employees to apply electronically for positions over the “Intranet,” and will also give HRMS an electronic mechanism to maintain, track, and reply to the applicants.
- ◆ Obtained authorization for VA to use the Voluntary Early Retirement Authority during FY 2003 (and reported on FY 2002 use of VERA).
- ◆ Revised Social Worker Qualification Standard to comply with legislation.

- ◆ Coordinated VA participation in OPM's GS-600 Occupational Standards Family Study.
- ◆ Coordinated VA participation in OPM pilot on IT competency-based qualification standards.
- ◆ Assisted Office of Security & Law Enforcement and VHA in addressing police hiring and retention.
- ◆ Revised Nurse Qualification Standard for grades 4 and 5.
- ◆ Provided Title 38 technical expertise to development of T38 computer-based training module.
- ◆ Reviewed and processed over 130 J-1 Waiver requests.
- ◆ Conducted Technical Review of over 25 Title 38 Board Actions.
- ◆ Conducted Technical Review and provided advice on administrative investigations.
- ◆ Led a Departmental Steering Committee on Telework to identify and remove impediments to telecommuting. In concert with the Administrations and staff offices, updated the existing policy, Alternative Workplace Arrangements (Flexiplace/Telework), VA Directive 5368. The new policy permits participation of Title 38 employees on a case-by-case basis, as endorsed by the SMC. This is the result of legislation, enacted on October 23, 2000, specifically Section 359 of Public Law 106-346, requiring that each Federal agency establish a telecommuting program; review barriers that inhibit the use of telecommuting; increase employee participation by permitting employees whose positions have been designated as suitable to participate in the program; and providing reports to OPM and Congress on agency progress. The division has developed a wide range of resource materials on telecommuting including a business case proposal that lays the foundation for employee participation.
- ◆ Presented Life Care presentations to Administrations and staff offices to explore alternative methods to address recruitment and retention issues with a goal toward procuring a service contract to benefit all VA employees. LifeCare's-- Life Event Management Services offers a proactive, comprehensive approach to recruiting, retaining, and motivating employees, acknowledging unique employee differences, and meeting critical business needs. Fundamentally, Life Event Management is about helping employees manage daily responsibilities and life events so they can be more productive at work, and lead better lives.
- ◆ Coordinated with OPM and VA field offices to conduct open seasons for the Federal Employees' Health Benefits program and Thrift Savings Plan.
- ◆ Actively participated in "A Call to Serve" campaign, launched on April 22. The campaign is a joint project of the Partnership for Public Service and the Office of Personnel Management. 350 colleges and universities have promised to educate their students about Federal employment opportunities. 36 federal agencies and a number of higher education associations serve as partners in the initiative.
- ◆ Participated in the prestigious Military Service Academy Career Conference Job Fair on April 26. Candidates were military service academy alumni, and some of the companies represented included Fortune 500 and Fortune 100. VA received over 20 resumes from participants interested in a wide range of positions.
- ◆ Participated in the annual Job Fair sponsored by *The Retired Officers Association*. Six VA personnel, representing a cross section of the Department, were there to answer questions ranging from how to apply for current vacancies to veterans benefits. VA received over 60 resumes from veterans.
- ◆ Implemented a Native American Employment initiative to increase Native Americans' access to career opportunities VA-wide.
- ◆ Provided advice and assistance to the Office of the Secretary and the White House Liaison on matters pertaining to the Department's employment of VA political appointees. Also interacted with White House Office of Presidential Personnel officials to facilitate political appointee actions.
- ◆ Provided advice and assistance on complex and sensitive staffing and classification issues pertaining to executives of the Department and in response to unique circumstances, e.g., Presidential Task Force, etc.
- ◆ Monitored and ensured expeditious handling of actions to implement initial headquarters and field reorganizations of the Veterans Benefits Administration, Veterans Health Administration, Office of Emergency Operations and Preparedness, and others.
- ◆ Convened monthly conference calls with HR Officers and others to articulate policy changes, implementation and obtain feedback concerning key HR issues.

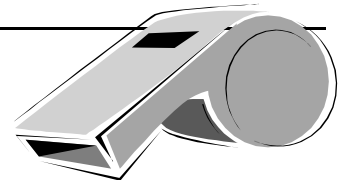
Women's Veterans Commemorated in Indiana

Ventris Gibson, DAS for Human Resources Management and the highest ranking female veteran in the Department of Veterans Affairs, was the featured speaker at the Indiana Women Veterans Expo in Indianapolis, Indiana. The event was co-hosted by the VA Regional Benefits Office and local Veterans Service Organizations and highlighted the contributions of women to our Nation's defense. Ms. Gibson addressed many VA employees at the Indianapolis Regional Benefits Office. Women veteran employees at the regional office hosted the event to showcase the long history of women's service to the Nation and to show appreciation to women employees at the regional office who had donned the uniforms of our military services. Ms. Gibson, a Navy veteran, traced her transition from the military to a VA regional benefits office. She provided the group with her assessment of how VA had improved in the delivery of benefits and services, especially health care to women veterans. On October 26, 2002, Ms. Gibson attended the Expo with local women veterans, and discussed VA's commitment to all veterans. The Expo attracted community-based service organizations who provided information on services that were available to women veterans residing in Indianapolis and surrounding areas. Ms. Gibson closed the afternoon with an address to women veterans at an Expo luncheon. As the keynote speaker, she lauded VA's commitment to improving services for women veterans and highlighted how the establishment and maintenance of a VA Center for Women Veterans demonstrates the Secretary's commitment to quality service and care to all women veterans.



Ms. Gibson (far left) poses with several women veteran employees from the Indianapolis VARO.

Whistleblower Protections



VA works to promote an environment where employees feel free to raise legitimate concerns *without fear of reprisal*.

Federal employees are protected from whistleblower reprisal and prohibited personnel practices under the provisions of the Whistleblower Protection Act (WPA) and 5 U.S.C. 2302c. In addition, Federal agencies have a statutory obligation to inform employees about their rights and the remedies available to them.

The Department is committed to fostering a culture where employees feel free to voice their legitimate concerns without fear of reprisal. Employees have the right to voice concerns about what they feel is a violation of any law, rule, or regulation or gross mismanagement, gross waste of funds, abuse of authority, or a substantial danger to public health or safety.

To assist agencies in meeting the aforementioned statutory obligation, the Office of Special Counsel (OSC) developed a certification program. The Department of Veterans Affairs is one of ten agencies selected by OSC to participate in the initial rollout of the program.

The OSC certification program involves the following 5 requirements:

- 1) Placing informational posters about WPA protections at facilities;
- 2) Providing information about these protections to new employees as part of the orientation process;
- 3) Periodic information to current employees about their rights and remedies under WPA;
- 4) WPA training for supervisors; and
- 5) Creation of a computer link from the agency's Web site to OSC.

VA has already complied with four of the above requirements and is currently working to ensure that supervisors and managers receive training. To that end, a satellite broadcast entitled "Whistleblower Protections" aired on November 22nd and 26th. This broadcast will be repeated beginning in January 2003 and supervisors are encouraged to use the broadcast to satisfy the training requirement.

Protecting employees' rights is not only a statutory obligation, it is good business. It protects VA's most valuable asset – its employees, promotes continuous improvement, and supports VA's strategic goal of being an employer of choice.

Training News

VALO Gets a Halo

In the August edition of **HR Highlights**, we told you about the launching of the VA Learning Online (VALO) Web site. Since our announcement, VALO has been reported by other sources as "a big hit" with VA employees. Since its implementation, the site has received more than 1 million hits! The site operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. VALO is revolutionizing the way employees obtain information about services, products, broadcasts, learning courses, and other material. If you have not already visited, go to <http://vaww.sites.lrn.va.gov/VACatalog/> and browse through the courses from various VA organizations. Courses are g added daily.

Satellite broadcasts from Training Systems Network (TSN) covering professional development, leadership, supervisory, and business skills training have recently been added to the VA Knowledge Network schedule. To find these broadcasts, type TSN in the search box on the VA Learning Catalog.

Free Training for GS-1 through GS-9

The Office of Human Resources and Administration's Office of Diversity Management and Equal Employment Opportunity, in partnership with the Employee Education System, is happy to present a course in developing your career. The 2 day course will cover a wide range of career development issues. If you want to improve your current job performance or make a positive change in your personal development, this course is recommended for you. Just complete the application for "Its Your Career" at this Web site and fax or e-mail it back to the numbers indicated.

<http://vaww.ees.lrn.va.gov/resources/local/HQ/default.asp>. The course is **free** and is open to all VACO employees in grades GS-1 through GS-9. The course will be conveniently presented at the Washington, DC, VA Medical Center on December 13 & 16, 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. No travel is required. All Applications must be received by December 11, 2002. Participants will be notified on December 12, 2002.

For more information on training opportunities, contact
Human Resources Development Service



(202) 273-4911

Come join us as we
"Receive the gift of knowledge!"

Outside the Box



The turkey is one of the most famous birds in North America. In fact, Benjamin Franklin wanted to make the wild turkey, not the Bald Eagle, the national bird of the United States!

The turkey's popularity is said to come from the American people's love of eating the bird for special occasions like Thanksgiving and Christmas.



The Federal Long Term Care Insurance Program

The Federal Long Term Care Insurance (LTCI) open season is running from July 1st through December 31, 2002. Federal LTCI is a new benefit that is available to Federal and postal employees, military personnel, retirees, survivors, spouses and certain other family members. LTCI covers the kind of care that you would need to help you perform daily activities if you had an ongoing illness or disability. Eligible employees can apply for LTCI on-line at www.ltcfed.com or by requesting an application package from LTC partners at 1-800-582-3337.

THRIFT SAVINGS PLAN (TSP) OPEN SEASON - TSP open season is running from October 15th through December 31, 2002. During the open season, eligible employees can start, change, or cancel the amount of contributions going to their TSP accounts. TSP elections received by the Health Revenue Center (HRC) on or before November 30th will become effective the first full pay period in December. Elections received after November 30th will become effective the following pay period in which received. VA employees can make their request through HRC by calling 1-800-414-5272 or by utilizing the HRC desktop computer application.



FEDERAL EMPLOYEES HEALTH BENEFITS (FEHB) OPEN SEASON - The FEHB open season is November 11th through December 9, 2002. During this time, any eligible employee who is not currently enrolled may enroll, and any eligible employee may change from one plan or option to another, from self only to self and family, or make a combination of these changes. In addition, open season allows employees to change their premium conversion election. All FEHB and premium conversion elections will be effective January 12, 2003. VA employees can make their request through the Health Revenue Center (HRC) by calling 1-800-414-5272 or by utilizing the HRC desktop computer application. For additional information, check out OPM's 2003 FEHB Web site at <http://www.opm.gov/insure/03/index.asp>

2002 W-2s - As the end of the calendar year rapidly approaches, make sure your address is correct for the mailing of your 2002 W-2. VA employees have until December 15, 2002, to make any necessary corrections. To make changes, go to <http://www.hrlinks.aac.va.gov/>



HR HIGHLIGHTS

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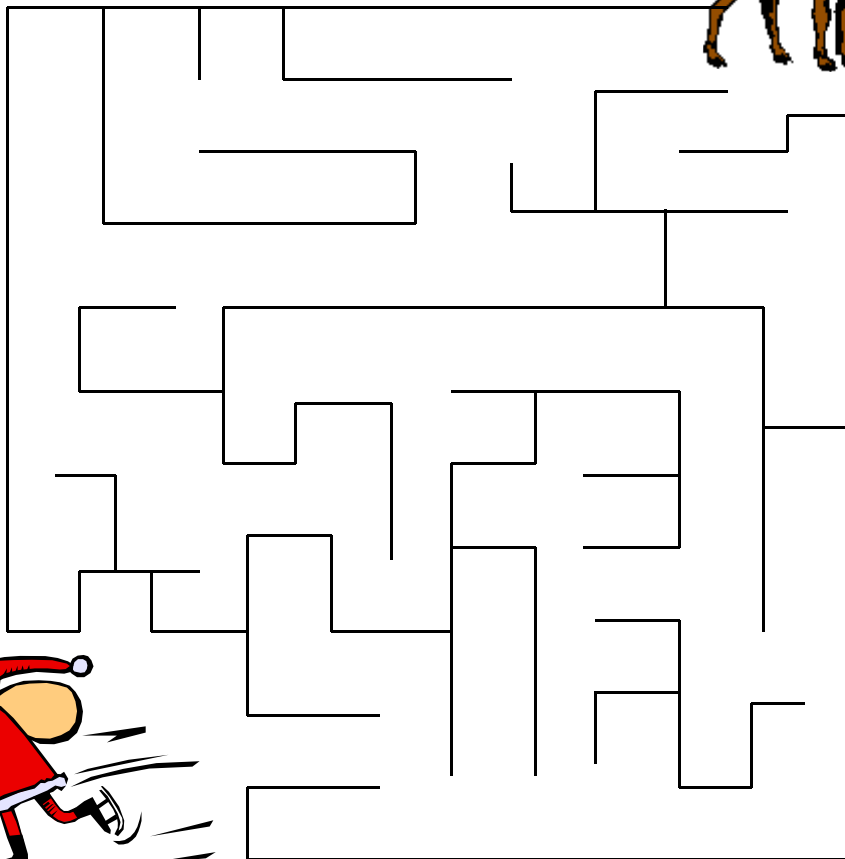
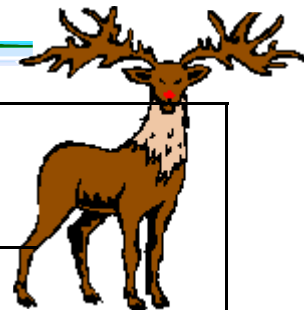
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The Fun Corner!

Please help Santa find Rudolph!



The **HR Highlights** extends a sincere apology to Ms. Joy Hunter, Veterans Health Administration, for the error made on our behalf in the October edition of **HR Highlights**. In the article entitled "2003 SES Candidate Development Program Selectees Announced," she was erroneously listed as Joyce M. Hunter. Please accept our apology and our congratulations.

The Editor

Comings and Goings

We would like to welcome new OHRM employees **Dennis Brickhouse** to the Executive Resources Staff and **Debra Doly**, who will be working with OHRM via the Hampton, Virginia VAMC.

Welcome back to **Julie Mosteller**, **Janiel Bryant** and **Angel Wolfrey**. Julie returns after being reactivated to the military, Janiel rejoins OHRM as a Stay-in-School employee after serving this year as a Summer Intern, and **Angel Wolfrey**, Director, OHRM, Executive Resources Service, returns after recently giving birth.

There are no farewells to report this month.

Quote of the Month

"There are no problems we cannot solve together and very few that we can solve by ourselves."
- Lyndon Johnson

Submitted by
Skip High

Submit a "quote" for future issues at
Highlights@mail.va.gov